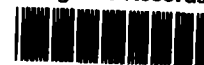




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South Bend Tribune

February 20, 2001

EPA to update cleanup for ex-landfill site in Elkhart

By CAROL DRAEGER
Tribune Staff Writer

ELKHART -- In a few weeks, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected to notify Bayer Corp., Himco Waste-Away Services and the city about updated cleanup rules for the defunct Himco landfill.

About a week ago, a developer and city officials met with EPA officials to find out if federal remediation strategies recommended in 1993 are adequate and if the old dump may be used for future private or public projects.

Apparently a private, unnamed developer has expressed interest to the city about redeveloping the 60-acre site, next to John Weaver Parkway and Country Road 10.

"We're not ready to make any announcements about what the possible reuses are," said Mark Brinson, Elkhart's planning director. "We're looking at creative ways for the site to be used for private development or public use."

The former, privately operated landfill was used from 1960 to 1976 as a depository for commercial, industrial, medical and general waste. It was designated a Superfund site in the early '70s after homeowners with shallow wells near the site complained to the Indiana State Board of Health about foam in their water.

When deeper wells drilled for homeowners became contaminated by high levels of sodium, Bayer Corp. and Himco Waste-Away connected residents to the city of Elkhart's water supply in 1990, according to an EPA fact sheet.

Superfund sites are hazardous waste sites eligible for federal money for cleanups.

In 1992, under an EPA request, Himco was ordered to remove 71 55-gallon drums buried in the landfill. The leaking drums contained hazardous contaminants, including toluene and xylene. According to a so-called record of decision report issued in 1993 by the EPA, Himco also was required to excavate 50 cubic yards of contaminated soil. The report also recommended the landfill be capped and that monitoring wells be tested regularly to ensure contaminants weren't leaching into nearby ground water.

But in 1995 the EPA found low-level ground water contamination outside the landfill's

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boundaries, particularly in areas southwest of the landfill. More testing has been conducted in soil near homes southwest of the landfill.

The final report on those tests are expected in a few weeks, or months, said an EPA official in Chicago who met with the city and developers on Feb. 7.

As recently as last March and April, EPA collected two rounds of water samples from residents living closest to the landfill. The results showed low levels benzene, chloroform arsenic, vinyl chloride and other hazardous contaminants.

Bottled water was offered as a "comfort" to the residents living nearest to the residents where the contaminants were found but whose water was not tested, according to a November EPA fact sheet on the Himco dump.

EPA officials also have asked the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to evaluate the long-term risks associated with the contaminants.

The EPA's tests of ground water-monitoring wells in the landfill in April will be explained in the upcoming report.

Gwen Massenburg, an EPA official in Chicago who met with the city and the developer, said the results may mean the EPA modifies its 1993 recommendations.

Brinson said public or private uses for the landfill, including building a parking lot on the site, may not be suitable if the contaminants are too volatile.

Last year the city investigated the idea of building a golf course on the land, but until the EPA rules on the quality of the soil, the city and future developers must wait.

"We're not in a position to move forward until we have some understanding of what's under the grounds," Brinson said. "If the site requires some capping, the question is, can you build on what's there."

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